

13th January 2021

Dear Parents,

Our thoughts and best wishes are with you all in these concerning and difficult times. We hope you are all well and managing in this exceptional situation. We are most grateful for your support, understanding and the many kind messages we have received.

We understand that the latest government decision to close schools for almost all children, except for children of critical workers and vulnerable children, will have a significant impact on you and your family. We recognise that these are extremely difficult and worrying times, and that parents and families may be under a wide range of pressures, particularly as we all continue to adapt to the updated expectations including adjusting to supporting children's learning at home, whilst also possibly working from home as well. The health, safety and wellbeing of all our children, staff and wider community is of paramount importance. The government guidance indicates that we all need to do what we can to reduce the spread of Coronavirus [Covid-19]. **Parents have been asked to keep their children at home, wherever possible and for schools to remain open only for those children who absolutely need to attend.**

As many of you are aware, the second anniversary of Mr Smith's sudden and sad death was in the recent school holidays. He was an amazing teacher and a great colleague who is missed by us all. I would like to thank everyone for their kind comments and best wishes. It is very much appreciated.

Although many children are currently at home, the school has commenced its new Learning Adventure, 'An Explorer's Expedition'. During the course of the Learning Adventure, children will go on an exciting expedition to a far-away place, learning about aspects of the geography curriculum whilst also engaging in a range of purposeful writing activities. Children will take part in preparing for the expedition, before embarking on a series of adventures and solving a range of problems. The new Learning Adventure context will be explored by children learning in school and at home. If your child is learning at home, you will find that the English sessions, as well as some other curriculum areas, such as Geography, are linked to this theme.

Remote Learning

Remote learning is now being provided for all those children not attending school and we are most grateful for all you do to support your child's learning at home. We would like to reassure parents that, whatever you can do to support your child's learning at home will be of benefit, even if not all sessions provided can be completed. [Please see separate letters sent out for further information and details.] In addition to your child's daily sessions, your child's teacher or a member of the staff team will also endeavour to make regular telephone contact with each family whose child/ren are based full time at home, so that links between school and home are maintained. Staff have commenced contacting our families and have been able to speak to many families already. You may also wish to use the class email contact if you have a question about how to support your child's home learning. Teachers will endeavour to get back to you as soon as possible, but please be patient when awaiting a response, as the teachers will be continuing to teach full time in school, alongside preparing resources for home learning.

Over the coming weeks, the school will be looking to introduce further innovations to the approach to remote learning, including the provision of some pre-recorded sessions [starting this week] and opportunities for small groups to take part in live video calls with their teacher [starting next week]. Our intention with the pre-recorded sessions will be to provide a high-quality learning resource, which replicates a full session, and which you and your child will be able to pause and rewind as required. We will only be able to provide some sessions in this format, due to the ongoing commitments of all teachers within their classrooms as they teach critical worker and vulnerable children. Details about the live video calls will follow in due course.

As you will appreciate, school closures have taken place at very short notice, so please bear with us as we adapt to the changing situation. Please also be aware that arrangements may be subject to change due to issues, such as, staff absence and other unforeseen circumstances.

Since the most recent government announcement, there has been a significant increase in the number of applications for critical worker and vulnerable children to attend school. In most cases, classes have a third to half of the children attending school. This is much higher than in the previous school closure, meaning that teachers are largely based full time within their classrooms. As you will appreciate, this poses significant challenges for the school in terms of providing for those children attending school, as well as for those children learning remotely. Despite these challenging circumstances, we can assure you that we are making every effort to ensure high quality provision for all Rushcombe children.

Vulnerable and Critical Worker Children

The school will continue to provide care for those children who are most **vulnerable** and for children whose parents are **critical** to the Covid-19 response. **Government guidance states that parents who are critical workers should keep their children at home if they can. It is important that children attend school only for you to complete your work as a critical worker.** We would ask that your child/ren only attend school when you are engaged in critical worker activities and there is no other alternative. The chief medical officer for England, Professor Chris Whitty, warns the next few weeks will be ‘the worst’ of the pandemic. We appreciate the challenges this brings, but to keep everyone as safe as we can, we need to reduce the overall number of social contacts/interactions in our community. The fewer children making the journey to school, and the fewer children in educational settings, the lower the risk that the virus can spread and infect people in our community.

We are grateful that many parents working in these key sectors have been able to ensure their child/ren are kept at home and **we ask all families to consider whether their child/ren need to attend school. The guidance outlines that every child who can be safely cared for at home should be, so that everyone including children, parents and staff are at less risk of exposure to the virus.** This will minimise the number of people who are in close proximity with one another and help to reduce the spread of infection. **The first and overriding principle is for everyone to stay at home. Even if you are working from home, if at all possible, your child should remain at home with you.** By doing so, we also help to relieve the pressures on the NHS and help to protect all people within society. **It is imperative that we do all we can to protect the people we love, those around us and in our community.** We thank you for your support, cooperation and understanding.

From tomorrow, vulnerable and key worker children will continue to be able to attend school each day from 8.30 am – 3.05 pm. There will continue to be a staggered drop off and collection times for all children attending school although the timings have been adjusted. Children can be dropped off between **8.30 am – 8.45 am** and picked up between **2.50 pm – 3.05 pm**.

Coronavirus - Minimising Risk to the School Community

With the significant increase in local and national infection rates, including the more highly transmittable variant of Coronavirus, **it is essential that we are all even more vigilant to avoid the spread of the virus and ensure the health and safety of our whole school community.** Everyone’s support in minimising the possibility of anyone becoming unwell and the need to self-isolate, is important. **We would appreciate it if critical workers and parents of vulnerable children continue to keep to the school’s staggered system for school drop off and collection times until further notice. This includes the use of the one-way system on the playground, maintaining appropriate social distancing, utilising a face mask/cover during drop off and collection times [unless you have a pre-existing health condition] and ensuring only one person accompanies your child to school. Please also continue to use the red lines outside each year group to queue for drop off/collection, ensuring that parents do not come any further forward than the red line nearest to your child’s year group entrance - this is to ensure appropriate social distancing for both parents and staff. In addition, please make your time on the school grounds as short as possible, including avoiding congregating with other parents/families. This includes ensuring that the area around the school gates are kept clear and that pathways around the school [including the pathways outside the main gates and around the car park] are used for socially distanced entry and exit purposes only.** If you have any messages for your child’s teacher, please contact them via the school office email, rather than relaying messages on the door in the morning - this will help to ensure that the staggered timings

work effectively and help to keep everyone safe. We appreciate your support and cooperation in helping us to sustain the health, safety and wellbeing of our whole school community.

As a school community working together, we can also reduce the risks by:

- **making sure that children and staff do not attend school if they or a member of their household has symptoms of coronavirus – it will be necessary to send a child/adult home if they become unwell**
- **self-isolating if you or anyone in your household has symptoms of Covid-19 immediately and booking a test for anyone with symptoms - if you are waiting for a test result you and your whole household must self-isolate until you get the result**
- **if you or someone in your household receives a positive test result or have been identified as a close contact, you must self-isolate for the required time period and advise the school**
- **expecting everyone to continue to follow the guidance in and out of school regarding contact and social/physical distancing, including wearing facemasks where required and particularly when the appropriate social distancing is difficult to maintain**
- **promoting regular hand washing for at least 20 seconds with water and soap or use of sanitiser and ensuring good respiratory hygiene by promoting the catch it, bin it, kill it approach**

We appreciate your support in helping us to sustain the health, safety and wellbeing of our whole school community.

Foundation Stage Admissions for 2021

A reminder that any parents wishing their child to come to Rushcombe First School in September 2021, for children born between 1st September 2016 and 31st August 2017, need to apply for a school place. Applications should be completed on-line at www.dorsetforyou.com/schooladmissions.

The closing date for all applications is 15th January 2021. Unfortunately, due to the current exceptional circumstances, I am unable to meet parents and show them around the school. However, I am more than happy to speak on the phone. Please pass this message on to any families you may know. If you need any advice or further information, please contact the school office.

Year 4 Transfer to Middle Schools

A reminder that if you have a child transferring to middle school in September 2021, applications should be completed on-line via the local authority website at www.dorsetforyou.com/schooladmissions. The closing date for all applications is 15th January 2021.

Foundation Vision Screening

The school has been advised that the vision screening scheduled for children in Foundation has been postponed due to the current exceptional circumstances has been postponed and will be rescheduled in due course.

Free School Meals

For those families that are entitled to a free school meal due to income, it is important that your child is registered for the free school meal. If you would like to find out if you are eligible, please visit the online eligibility checker at <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/education-and-training/schools-and-learning/at-school/free-school-meals.aspx> This online form only takes a few moments to complete and will give you an immediate response. We would encourage you to do this, as the school also receives much needed additional funding for each child that is registered. Once an award is made, please inform the school office. Meals are ordered on-line via the Chartwells website, as above. If you have any queries, please contact the school office.

School Uniform Award

If your child does qualify for a free school meal [due to income] and the award is granted by the Local Authority, the Governing Body of Rushcombe First School has agreed that those children who are in receipt of a free school meal award will also be eligible to receive a one off annual school uniform award. This will include the following: one Rushcombe First School sweatshirt, one Rushcombe PE t-shirt, one pair of red shorts and one Rushcombe book bag. The items can be claimed once at any time during each academic year.

School Office and Messages for Staff

A reminder that **the school office is only partially open to parents and visitors and we ask that you refrain from visiting the school office wherever this can be avoided. In the first instance, we request that all communications are made via email or phone to the school office**, including any messages for your child's teacher. A telephone appointment to speak with a member of staff will be made for you if necessary. If you need to visit the school office for essential reasons [or if agreed with a member of the school office], the entrance area has been marked with physical/social distancing demarcations and there is a taped line by the office window to ensure the appropriate social/physical distance is in place. In the office foyer, there are two boxes/containers, one for paperwork, such as, letters/permission slips, and one for objects/parcels. Entrance to other areas of the school will not be permitted, unless by prior agreement/appointment. We would be grateful if you could wear a face mask/covering when visiting the school office, unless you have a medical exemption.

Coronavirus [Covid-19] Guidance [Please see separate information letter for more details.]

Please remember that if your child or any member of the household have symptoms of coronavirus infection [COVID-19], **however mild**, you will all need to stay at home for 14 days from when the symptoms started. The most common symptoms of coronavirus [COVID-19] are:

- **High temperature [feels hot to touch on the back or chest – a temperature of 37.6 degrees and above]**
- **New continuous cough [this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual)]**
- **Loss or change to your normal sense of smell or taste [anosmia]**

More details of the symptoms can be found: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/symptoms/>

It is important that anyone with symptoms is tested. If your child presents with Covid-19 symptoms, they will not be able to come to school and you should book a test. A test can be booked or ordered online via NHS UK, using the following link: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-for-coronavirus/> **It is essential that the school is advised of the test outcome.** Where the child or staff member tests negative, they can return to school, if they are well enough, and the fellow household members can end their self-isolation. If there is a confirmed case in school, it may be necessary for other children/groups of children and staff to isolate at home. We will work closely with Public Health England who will advise us of the course of action.

If your child appears to present with any of these symptoms when they are in school, we will contact you and you will be advised to follow the [COVID-19: guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection guidance](#).

You can seek further medical advice from NHS 111 and you can also use the Department for Education coronavirus helpline, which is available to answer questions about COVID-19 on T: 0800 046 8687. The helpline is open between 8am to 6pm (Monday to Friday) and 10am to 4pm (Saturday to Sunday).

The school will endeavour to remain open for all children, however, if there are confirmed case/s or insufficient safe staffing levels, the school may have to close or partially close for a period of time. The school will keep parents updated with any decisions by parentmail as soon as they can. If in the event that children have to self-isolate at home or that our school has to be partially/closed, teaching staff will provide home learning for each child/year group via Microsoft Teams [Please see previous letters for further details.]

Support and Information

Please see the following link for additional information and guidelines about Coronavirus and a confidential helpline number for those who may need advice if you are worried about work and/or money. If you need help with access to food, warm clothes or need someone to talk to then support is available.

<https://mailchi.mp/dorsetcouncil/latest-coronavirus-covid-19-news-and-information-17-march-3121566>

[Find out about support available](#)

In addition, as part of the COVID Winter Grant, Dorset Council have funded Citizen's Advice to help families with the cost of the utility bills. They can make rapid £200 payments to support families, as well as connecting to additional areas of help. You can apply online [Get help with your utility bills - Dorset Council](#) or by ringing 01929 408950.

It may also be of use for some parents to know that the school has been advised that Microsoft Teams can be accessed via an X-Box or Play Station.

Finally

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your continued support, understanding and cooperation. The school will continue to keep you updated as the situation develops or changes and more information is available. On behalf of the Rushcombe First School staff team, we wish each of our families the very best.

Yours sincerely,



Mrs C Mahon
Headteacher